

Town of Richmond Housing Committee Notes

Date: July 8, 2021

Time Started: 7:45

Time Ended: 9:15

Ravi Venkataraman (Host)

Present: Virginia Clarke, Mark Hall, Sarah Heim (Chair), Zachary Maia, Connie van Eeghen

Guest: Brandy Saxton, Shiferaw Gemeda (CVOEO)

Absent: Carole Furr, Miranda Lescaze, Jackie Pichette,

Quorum is 5; 5 votes to pass any motion

1. Welcome and troubleshooting
2. Adjustments to Agenda – no changes
3. Approval of May 13, 2021 meeting minutes
 - a. Discussion: Virginia proposed a change to this statement in 4.h.iii “Any provided an example with the Town of Colchester” to “Amy provided an example with the Town of Colchester”
 - b. Moved to accept as amended: Connie
 - c. Seconded: Mark
 - d. Unanimously passed
4. Reorganization Meeting - Election of Chair and Clerk
 - a. Moved to re-elect Sarah as Chair and Connie as Clerk:
 - i. Virginia moved
 - ii. Mark seconded
 - iii. Unanimously passed
5. Municipal Planning Grant Update
 - a. Brandy provided an update on the survey
 - i. Survey closed last week; results compiled quantitative data
 - ii. Next: analyze qualitative data and non-resident surveys
 - iii. A reasonable turnout of 339 responses, 160 of which were non-residents – an unusually high (and good) number
 - b. Sarah asked Sarah asked about responsiveness rates - more women than men responded, young adults and 1 and 2 person houses were underrepresented. Brandy said she hopes that this indicates that women are submitting responses on behalf of their households. She can't totally explain the discrepancies. She also saw this in the Hinesburg community survey. Typically, it's harder to get younger and renting households engaged in community outreach efforts. We received fewer responses from renters than would be representative of the community as a whole. But she's pleased that we got the number of responses that we did. Often folks who are newer to town and less connected into the networks of communication we use to encourage participation. They may feel that housing studies aren't relevant to them or that their issues and concerns won't be address. Good for us to keep that in mind as we continue forward and try to get folks to engage with us. Brandy is concerned that we heard from no residents of Riverview Commons. If we want a fuller picture of housing needs and issues, getting input from that group is important.
 - c. Sarah asked if it would it be worth reopening the survey to try to do targeted outreach to Riverview Commons? Brandy said that in other communities, groups typically had to do more targeted outreach to engage residents in mobile home developments. So it might be better to figure out how to effectively reach out to them in other ways. Starskboro has an organized community engagement strategy for engaging residents who live in the mobile home development, which they use to address various issues like public safety, land use, schools. Brattleboro also has done targeted projects and outreach to that neighborhood and community and found that to be more effective than hoping the residents would be able and comfortable with participating in broader outreach efforts. We should try to find a way to meet the residents where they're at. There's commonly a sense of exclusion because they feel like they're not included in the community. Helpful to think about directly interfacing with them. She's also done some work with St. George which faces similar struggles.

- d. Last month Ravi reached out to the owner of the mobile home park, who said he put paper copies of the survey in a mailer to all the mobile home park units. Last week, Ravi reached out to him to ask if he collected any completed surveys. Ravi's waiting to hear back from him. So we may still get some input from the paper copies.
- e. Mark noted that the survey results reflected concerns about adding certain types of housing. Asked how those responses compare to what Brandy's seen in other communities. Response of people living in Richmond Village to the question about adding more housing to the village is more positive than what Brandy's seen in other communities. There appear to be a fair number of people who either chose not to express an opinion or who may have no opinion. So it doesn't give us a strong sense of how people may react if we can up with a project. One piece that came across clearly is that the idea of larger scale multi-unit housing doesn't fit with people's perception of Vermont.
- f. Plan for interviews and focus groups
 - i. May need to wait until September to conduct these but helpful to plan these now
 - ii. Consider targeting mobile home residents
 - iii. Goal is to conduct three, possibly younger residents, older residents, and those in accessory dwelling units – who are relatively few in Richmond, based on survey results
 - 1. Virginia: do we want more input about reactions to ADUs?
 - 2. Ravi: Town of Richmond considered revising ownership requirements of ADUs but made no changes; looking for recommendation about whether ADUs may help Richmond housing
 - 3. Brandy: recent changes to the state statute keeps current Richmond requirements within the statute
 - 4. Virginia: there may be some resistance to requirements of owners with rental housing
 - 5. Brandy: recommends not organizing focus group around ADUs
 - 6. Mark: use focus groups to test receptivity to different ideas of improving housing in Richmond
 - 7. Brandy: the municipality does not have ability to affect many of the structural aspects of the housing environment. In the survey results reviewed so far, the available affordable housing that has funding (multi-unit, large structures) is not highly desirable across a broad representation of residents – including those seeking housing.
 - 8. Virginia: Does more housing produce more affordable housing?
 - 9. Brandy: no. More diversity of housing might be helpful, even without specifying price points or rental rates. Underhill housing study identified a reasonable supply of housing, but for the first time buyer, required considerable work in improvements. This kind of discovery can be addressed by a municipality. These findings surfaced from survey results and focus groups, and also by comparing assessed values of properties with market prices. It is clear that many Richmond renters would like to be able to become home owners; a focus group of these residents may be helpful.
 - 10. Sarah: hearing from renters is important
 - 11. Virginia: the Planning Commission is considering whether small (3-4 family) units might help – how do people feel about this.
 - 12. Brandy: yes, as well as including duplex dwellers as well. Note that code requirements apply to buildings of 5 units or more that it make economically unattractive for property owners to convert to. Another barrier is downtown residency of upper story apartments, often due to parking limitations. Virginia noted that Richmond ordinances require a parking plan but is not sure of the effect of the ordinance.
 - 13. Virginia: ADU financing is very difficult to arrange, providing another reason to look elsewhere. Brandy: agreed; there are many barriers to putting up an ADU, except in wealthy communities.
 - iv. Brandy and Ravi will finalize focus groups to gather a fuller picture of housing needs, issues, and concerns are in the community to include younger renters, employers, older residents... Aging in place (55+ years) residents feel comfortable with meeting their goals for residency. Sarah asked if we need to choose between older residents and employers. Brandy's experience in Underhill indicated that older people were looking for more manageable properties. Virginia: consider asking

what younger people need to stay in Richmond and whether Richmond is attractive to them. Zachary: young residents, older residents, and employers are good target populations for focus groups. Virginia: mobile home residents? Brandy: if there is infrastructure to help organize outreach. The mobile park manager might be a good person to interview. Virginia will reach out to her contact. Connie: Perhaps the Housing Committee could make it a long term goal to develop a relationship with mobile park residents and learn more from them over time. Brandy will plan for focus groups and interviews (6) in the fall based on the list of suggested contacts from our previous meeting, including developers.

6. Housing Committee reflection with Shiferaw Gameda (CVOEO) (Connie left the meeting at 9:02; the committee no longer had a quorum at this point
 - a. Mr. Shiferaw Gameda is reaching out to housing communities across VT to help them share their experiences and help connect them with resources. Jericho Housing Committee was having a similar conversation to ours, discussing ADUs. We can email him any time with ideas for best practices around affordable and inclusive housing.
 - b. Virginia - is CVOEO compiling best practices to distribute to the housing committees?
 - i. Shiferaw - Yes.
 - ii. Virginia - We're supposed to fill out this form and send it back?
 - iii. Shiferaw - Yes
 - c. Mark - We're a year old, relatively new. Something helpful for us is getting grant money to work with Brandy to complete our housing needs assessment. Best practice is really getting data about the community first to make educated decisions on how to support affordable housing in your community. We're not at a place to make those recommendations, but that's the hope for the future. We'd love to hear best practices for other, more well established committees.
 - d. Zach - Agrees with Mark. There's a question on the survey asking which resources or organizations have been most helpful. The municipal planning grant program was really critical to helping us to collect data.
 - e. Mark - Having some housing expertise on the committee was also critical. Working with folks like Brandy is really important.
 - f. Virginia - is there a timeframe for our responses to CVOEO's questions?
 - i. Shiferaw - We can take a month or so to respond.
 - ii. Ravi will fill out the worksheet and send it back to Shiferaw. Most of the answers should be in our committee charge and the work we've done to date.
7. Update from the Planning Commission – postponed to next meeting
8. Other Business
 - a. Ravi sent a "Town Plan Goals Check-in" to Sarah, to complete as the chair. Virginia also offered her input if we have any questions
 - b. Zach is losing his housing in an ADU b/c the owner is selling. He might not be available for some upcoming meetings.
 - c. Next meeting: Plan for 4th Tuesdays, starting August 24 from 7:30-9:00
 - d. Proposed agenda to be determined later
 - e. The committee adjourned at 9:02 pm (no vote taken as the committee did not have a quorum).

Recorded by Connie van Eeghen and Sara Heim